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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000821

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CHEN-SOONG MEETING AND CROSS-
STRAIT RELATIONS

1. Summary: The Taipei dailies gave considerable reporting February 25 of the meeting between President Chen Shui-bian and People First Party Chairman James Soong, which took place Thursday. The meeting was treated as a local political issue, though the 10-point joint statement issued by Chen and Soong after their talks largely concerned Taiwan's national status and future cross-strait relations. Interestingly, the largest circulation Liberty Times, which supports Chen's own party, was the only daily to carry the story on the inside pages instead of on the front page. The pro-unification and centrist dailies said Chen's statement regarding Taiwan's national status indicated that he is moving toward the middle-of-the-road direction, while all the pro-independence newspapers criticized that Chen has deviated from Taiwan's growing consciousness of its sovereignty and has upset all the pan-green and pro-independence supporters.

2. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" questioned in its editorial why it bothers for China to write an 'anti-secession' law when Chen has himself deprived Taiwan of its sovereignty. An editorial of the pro-independence "Taiwan Daily," however, said Chen's statement that he will not declare Taiwan independence during his term of office is actually an announcement to the United States and Japan telling them that Taiwan has done its best to maintain the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. A commentary in the pro-unification "United Daily News" called Washington, Beijing, Chen and Soong four human press pawns on the cross-strait chessboard whereas the only factor that can affect their movements is their own interests. A commentary in the centrist "China Times" said the concessions Chen made to Soong during their talks indicated that Chen would also make concessions to the Beijing government, which might push the cross-strait relations to a new stage in the next three years. End summary.

A) "It Turns out Unexpectedly that President Chen Is to Carry out Policies Advocated by a Defeated Presidential Candidate"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" commented in its editorial (2/25):

"In general, given the 10-point statement signed between President Chen and James Soong, there is no need for China to write the 'anti-secession law' because the 10-point statement is in reality similar to a Taiwan version of the 'anti-secession law.' Since Chen has already deprived Taiwan of its sovereignty himself, why would it bother for China to do it again [by enacting the 'anti-secession law']? The United States and Japan have taken some actions lately to repeatedly warn China not to play with the fire of the 'anti-secession law.' But our state leader is now putting on the tightness made of the 'one China constitution' himself simply because his administration has failed to win a legislative majority and he wants to create a [friendly] atmosphere so as to get his bills passed. If China exercises any restraint with regard to its 'anti-secession' law, the most important reason is perhaps because of the 10-point statement other than the pressure from the United States and Japan. ."

B) "Why President A-Bian Has to Shoulder all the Criticism While James Soong Appears to be Complacent?"

The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" editorialized (2/25):

"If [we] review President Chen's remarks at the Chen-Soong meeting from another perspective, [we] may say that Chen was actually well intended but little understood. At the time when both Washington and Tokyo have included the Taiwan Strait as one of the two countries' 'common strategic objectives,' the DPP government felt the need to convey to the United States

and Japan Taiwan's efforts in seeking to stabilize the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. President Chen thus announced at the Chen-Soong talks that during his term of office, he would not declare Taiwan independence. Chen is in fact making an announcement to the governments of the United States and Japan that Taiwan has done its best to maintain the status quo and that should a war break out in the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan, the one who extends an olive branch, is not the one to be blamed. ."

C) "Interests of the Four Human Chess Pawns Shape Their [Future] Movements"

Journalist Hsiao Heng-chien observed in the conservative, pro-unification "United Daily News" (2/25):

"The meeting between President Chen Shui-bian and People First Party Chairman James Soong finally took place and a 10-point consensus was reached, which focused mostly on the cross-Strait relations. On the chessboard of cross-Strait relations, Beijing, Washington, President Chen, and James Soong are in reality four human chess pawns, and the only factor that can affect their movements is their own `interests.'

"On the cross-Strait chessboard, judged by the current international and domestic situations, the stability across the Taiwan Strait is the greatest common denominator for the interests of Washington and Beijing. The breakthrough in the cross-Strait relations, on the other hand, is the greatest common denominator for the interests of President Chen and James Soong.

"For Washington, North Korea is the priority problem it needs to resolve now, and Beijing has to deal with international issues and its domestic development now. The Taiwan issue is not on the agenda of either of the two countries that needs to be urgently addressed now. However, it will be greatly conducive for Washington and Beijing if both sides of the Taiwan Strait could maintain a certain form of stability. That is why both Washington and Beijing, in the wake of last year end's Legislative Yuan election, have sought to take advantage of the opportunity when both Chen and Soong hope to gain their own interests, to push for such a meeting ."

D) "Unique Power Positions Work to Push for the Chen-Soong Meeting"

Journalist Chen Chia-hung noted in the "My Views" column of the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" (2/25):

". More importantly, Chen Shui-bian's `concessions' made toward James Soong also indicated that [Chen's] administration would make `concessions' to the Beijing government. Beijing, which has previously judged and set its views about Chen but is also eager to develop cross-Strait relations, has found [at the Chen-Soong meeting] a perfect chance for it to extricate itself from such an awkward position. In consideration of the fact that Chen has modified the keynote of his cross-Strait policy, Beijing might act on the needs of Chen and Soong and push the cross-Strait relations to a new stage in the next three years. ."

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